Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages | Commissariat aux langues officielles

Newsroom

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Canada's immigration policy must contribute to our social and linguistic fabric

In a study published today the Commissioner of Official Languages, Dr. Dyane Adam, concludes that the Government of Canada's immigration and integration policies do not go far enough in contributing to the vitality of Canada's two official language groups. The study, entitled *Immigration and the Vitality of Canada's Official Language Communities: Policy, Demography and Identity*, was prepared for the Office of the Commissioner by Dr. Jack Jedwab of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada. It is the first study of its kind to analyze this important issue in depth.

"Immigration is now the single most important factor contributing to the real growth of Canada's population and, as such, it has become critical to the demographic renewal of our official language communities. Linguistic duality is a fundamental characteristic of our national identity and Canada's immigration policy must do more than simply give points for knowledge of official languages when immigrants are selected," declared Dr. Adam.

The study released today shows that the concerns first expressed by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1969 were founded: Francophones have generally not had their fair share of immigration to Canada. First, statistics show a significant disparity between the proportion of immigrants who know English and French when they come to Canada : 5% French-only speakers, as compared to 48% English-only speakers, 4% who can speak both official languages and 43% who speak neither. Once they have settled here, most immigrants adopt the English language. Some 83% use English, while 7% use French and 3% use both official languages. Second, the federal government has not been making any pro active effort to recruit French-speaking immigrants overseas. Most French-speaking immigrants to Canada settle in Quebec, with the province receiving some 84% of all immigrants who speak French only upon arrival and some 57% of all new arrivals who declared knowledge of both English and French.

Dr. Adam points out that Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) has shown sensitivity to this issue. In fact, the new *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* recognizes that immigration is to support "the commitment of the Government of Canada to enhance the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada." For the Commissioner, "while this is definitely a step in the right direction, there is still a lot of ground to cover to make this objective a reality."

A number of issues must be addressed in order to ensure that Francophone communities outside Quebec can benefit from immigration:

- Citizenship and Immigration Canada, in collaboration with Francophones from official language minority communities, must do more promotion and recruitment in potential source countries for Francophone immigration;

- This study urges CIC to develop benchmarks to increase the number of French-speaking immigrants who will settle in regions outside Quebec;

- In order to assist the official language minority communities in welcoming immigrants, they must receive support from the federal government at all levels of the processfrom planning to settlement and integration activities;

- There is a definite need to reach out to French-speaking immigrants in minority communities who are often unaware that Francophone institutions exist and that many services are available in French;

- Finally, since integration is a two-way process that ultimately can change the identity of the host community, this study urges Francophone official language minority communities to be prepared to adapt to accommodate the diverse needs of ethnocultural Francophones.

The study shows that the challenges for the Anglophone community in Quebec are somewhat different. Quebec's current share of English-speaking immigrants exceeds the share of the Anglophone population in Quebec. The vast majority of these immigrants settle in and around Montreal, where the Anglophone population is more and more diverse. Given the high rate of interprovincial migration of English-speaking immigrants, the principal challenge in Quebec is to retain these new arrivals. Anglophone institutions in Quebec must be provided with the ability to counteract this phenomenon by instilling in immigrants a sense of community. As well, outside the Montreal area, just as in the other provinces, the official language minority communities do not have the adequate institutions and structures needed to help immigrants adapt to their new environment.

"The federal government, along with the provinces, must consider concrete ways to enable official language communities to share equitably in the benefits of immigration. Policies and action plans must be developed to support this objective. Immigration must not be based solely on economic considerations; we must ensure that it truly contributes to Canada's social and linguistic fabric," concluded the Commissioner.

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